today!" I returned to the lawyer's and spent another day meeting people and talking politics. By evening I was tired of this pastime and yearned to go back to Jilkino.

Early the next morning I was at the landing. There was no fog over the river; its surface was steel gray. The guards at the pier had been replaced by a large signboard: "Danger! Keep off!" I stepped on the ice. It seemed solid enough. I took a few steps—the ice did not crack. Without hesitation I started toward the far pier. The surface stretched like a sheet of glass from shore to shore, but beneath it pieces of ice moved with unbelievable speed. More than once the ice under my feet seemed to bend, but this might have been an optical illusion.

I had passed the middle of the river when I noticed a change: the ice no longer looked like a sheet of glass but was uneven and opaque, like a pile of fleece. Suddenly it broke under my feet. I had time to stretch out both arms. The ice was at my armpits, its thin crust holding my weight. I began to test the ice blocks within reach of my hands. The nearest were either too small or too slippery to provide a hold. Then I found a fairly large block, seized it with both hands, and began to inch my way in its direction. I do not know how long it took until I was lying on the solid ice. I was completely exhausted, but the thought that my soaked overcoat would freeze to the ice made me stand up. Since the Jilkino shore was nearer than Irkutsk, it seemed sensible to continue the crossing.

The ice again became smooth and transparent and I reached the shore without accident. It was good to feel the soft snow under my feet! Unfortunately, there was no dwelling on the shore between the pier and Jilkino. To keep myself warm I began to run. When Stepanida saw me, out of breath, in a soaked and frozen overcoat, she threw up her arms and asked, "Were you sober or drunk when you fell through?"

"Sober," I managed to answer through chattering teeth.

"Too bad," she replied. "Ice water is all right for a drunk, but bad when one is sober."

She poured a glass of awful vodka into me, followed by a glass of strong hot tea with the same vodka. Then she ordered me into bed and covered me with all the blankets she could find in the house. I awoke after dusk. I felt as tired as after a day's hard work and at first could not remember what had happened. Yet, thanks to Stepanida's treatment, I did not catch even the slightest cold.

When I told my Irkutsk friends of my adventure on the thin ice, they persuaded me to apply to the Governor General for transfer to the city, a place where I could find a job so as not to risk my life crossing the Angara.